

cation teams have difficulty determining the status of patients once triage has been performed. In the Arizona system, once a patient in need of *immediate* treatment and transport has been identified and tagged, a large, reflective red label is placed on or near the patient (see Figure 12). This label, which rescuers can easily spot from a distance, clearly identifies those who need priority treatment and transport.

EMS tactical benchmarks

Tactical benchmarks allow EMS systems to evaluate their effectiveness in completing defined tasks. Central Arizona EMS agencies have incorporated the use of two new EMS tactical benchmarks during major medical incidents to improve the identification and transport of critical patients: the triage report and the declaration, "all immediates transported."

Triage report

Before the tactical benchmarks were implemented, the dispatch center received triage reports sporadically. Now, as soon as triage is complete, the triage officer gives incident command a formal triage report.

A triage report gives critical information to responding crews on the number of patients and severity of their injuries. It also provides command with essential information that helps guide decisions about whether to call for additional resources or scale back the response.

Example: The triage officer may present a triage report at a two-vehicle collision as:

"Triage to command. Triage complete. We have a total of nine patients—two immediates, three delayed and four minors."

"All immediates have been transported"

When responding to a major medical incident, first responders can easily become overwhelmed by the enormity of the situation. If this happens, critical mistakes can occur. *One common error:* Providers try to resuscitate a blunt trauma code instead of directing efforts toward other critically injured patients. *Another common error:* treating and transporting patients based on proximity, ease or convenience rather than focusing on the most severely injured.

To prevent this from occurring, the central Arizona fire and EMS agencies adopted another EMS tactical benchmark. When all critically injured patients have departed the scene, the transportation sector officer radios

incident command and reports that "all immediates have been transported." Incident command then provides the information to dispatch.

This declaration serves two purposes. First, it emphasizes the importance of quickly stabilizing and transporting the most critical patients. The triage training programs have emphasized the importance of doing so and stressed that time-consuming ALS treatment should be performed en route to the hospital when possible.

Second, an "all immediates transported" designation reduces the stress of field personnel. Scene urgency and intensity decrease once everyone knows that critical patients have been transported.

Conclusion

For more than 20 years, the Phoenix Fire Department and surrounding EMS agencies used a separate four-color tag system to identify and sort patients during a major medical incident. This system did not match current international color conventions for patient identification or incorporate newer developments in patient triage techniques, such as the START triage method or tracking stubs..

The new Arizona Triage System has enabled participating services to improve their readiness to respond, triage, treat and transport patients during multiple patient incidents. It has been approved by the Arizona Department of Health and the Arizona State Trauma Advisory Board. The system has been adopted by the central, northern and southern Arizona EMS regions. All regions have received state grants to provide training and triage kits to urban and rural EMS providers.

These MCI operational changes, as well as the Phoenix Fire Department standard operating procedures relating to multi-patient and MCI response (Volumes 2 and 12), can be viewed on the Internet at www.ci.phoenix.az.us/phxfire.html in the document section.

The triage packs, START triage tags with cable ties and red, reflective IMMEDIATE labels and an educational video on the Arizona Triage System can be purchased from Bound Tree ALS Medical Products, 800/533-0523, via e-mail at info@bound-tree.com, or via the Web at www.bound-tree.com.

Dean Pedrotti, CEP, AAS, BS, MBA, is a captain/paramedic with the Phoenix Fire Department. A 17-year veteran, he spent three years as an EMS officer and is currently assigned to Engine 17. Contact him via e-mail to dpedrotti@ci.phoenix.az.us.